

SELF-EDUCATION IN MUSICAL APPRECIATION

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When Gandhiji outlined his views on education half a century ago, the pundits of pedagogy regarded them as obscurantist and reactionary. But even that detail in his teaching which need not be considered basic to theory—the sale of the produce of education through crafts to make education less expensive, even self-sufficient, in a poor country—is now being strongly advocated by educationists like Goodman and Illich. As for the core of his teaching, it is identical with what Piaget has been saying all his life: real education is gained through sensory and motor experience of reality.

This view of education makes it at once clear that education is a life-long process. Formidable though Illich's criticism of the present school system is, we may not be able to usher in a de-schooled society straightforward. But we must pay attention to the need for recognising real education to be co-extensive with life and explore the avenues for self-education outside and beyond the school and college. The possibilities here are far more fascinating and inspiring than usually assumed. Ross Terrill in his book, *R.H. Tawney and His Times* (Harvard Univ. Press, 1970) describes many sessions of the Workers Education Association where adults who did not have the benefit of regular schooling discussed with perception and real enjoyment the poetry of Arnold, Whitman and others. Whitehill (*American Scholar*, Summer 1969) likewise reports his exciting experience with a Great Books Class organised by the inmates of a prison. He was astonished to see the minds of these men, none of them with more than a high school education, "moving easily among Kierkegaard, Sartre, Camus, Thomas Aquinas, Hobbes and St. Augustine."

The important point to note is that aids for self-education—handy editions of classics in this instance—should be easily available. In fact one reason why one cannot dismiss Illich's call for abolishing schools as casual and irresponsible is the fact that he has given meticulous thought to the provision of such aids. For instance he has given detailed suggestions for the provision of Reference Services to Educational Objects which can be stored in libraries, rental agencies, museums and even in farms and factories.

Abroad, even before Illich came out with his detailed plan, such material has been growing up. In the West, it is astonishing how culture, once the privilege of the blue-blooded with a lot of unearned income, has been made accessible to the proletariat, the Great Unwashed. You can pick up most European languages with the help of gramophone discs. You can crash into even a very highbrow field like classical music with the help of very carefully planned aids.

One of the finest of such aids is the *History of Music Through Ear and Eye*, a combined project by the Oxford University Press and the Columbia Gramophone Company with Dr. Percy Scholes, author of the *Oxford Companion to Music*, as the editor. In five albums of eight records each, the evolution of European music has been traced from the days of the Early Organum (900-1050) to the atonal and electronic music of our own days. Extended analyses of form and technique in the accompanying printed texts guide the listener to the right approach. Very complex concepts like the structure of the fugue and the first movement form of the sonata become intelligible in this ideally helpful treatment. Repeated hearings have helped even a moron like the present writer to a finer delight in music.

Similar aids for the study of Indian music would be immensely valuable. The need was recognised quite some time back, but the efforts have been seriously inadequate. In the late fifties HMV released an LP disc (ECLP 2263) entitled "An Introduction to the Music of India." But a compilation of short sequences of vocal, sarod and sitar music could scarcely be considered an introduction to Indian music. Then, in the early sixties, the Inter-National Cultural Centre of New Delhi in collaboration with Parlophone released an album of three LPs (PMAE 501-3). With the top talents mobilised for the project—M.S. Subbulakshmi, K.S. Narayanaswami, Palghat Mani, Ali Akbar, Ravi Shankar and Bismillah—it is a compact, wholly admirable set on classical Indian music of the north and south. But, even after taking into account the excellently written explanatory brochure that accompanies it, one could not accept the set as a self-contained self-educational aid of the type of the Scholes album.

A Landmark

To qualify for this purpose, the planning has to be very specific and through. The capacities of the voice and the instruments, techniques of singing and playing, the structure of the scale and musical forms have to be clarified with the utmost lucidity. There should be the closest rapport between comment and example. In the light of these considerations the album of four LPs entitled "Introducing Indian Music" prepared by Baburao Joshi and Antsher Lobo in the middle sixties deserves to be hailed as a landmark in this field. The set consists of eight demonstration lectures which take the listener step by step through the scale, melodic patterns and embellishments, the *Raga*

and *Tala* systems, classical and light classical forms and instrumental music. The accompanying book gives the complete text and the musical examples are illustrated both in the Indian notation and the Western staff notation. In the section on embellishments, the oscillating circuit and cyclic shape of *Gamaks* and the spiralling rise of some *Tanas* have been demonstrated with magnificent clarity. The aesthetic logic of form, the definitive nature of structure in art, have been brought out brilliantly by the introduction of prohibited notes in *Raga* elaboration which immediately exposes the betrayal of both form and feeling through the jarring discord. The Indian *Tala* system can be extremely complex and the guidance given to the listener for spotting the *Sama*, the stressed down beat, in the lyrical line is extremely helpful. And some of the demonstrations of *Kheyal*, *Thumri* and *Kajari* rate high as beautiful singing, and not merely as valuable instructional specimens.

This set is an excellent model, but in further production of this type, great economy can be effected. In this developing country we have to pay for disc space through our nose and therefore it should be reserved solely for music. This is how the Scholes album has been planned. In the Lobo-Joshi set, the commentary, already available in the accompanying book, appears again as spoken word in the discs. If this unnecessary and costly repetition had been avoided, disc space would have become available for double the number of musical examples.

With a vast heritage like ours, it is very clear that only a small beginning has been made. The problem is how to go about for providing a really adequate collection of material for self-education in musical appreciation. Planning an album of three or four dozen LPs and releasing one LP a month should not be an unworkable commercial proposition. But classical music even now forms only a small proportion of the monthly output of the recording houses, the bulk of it being Indian film music and pop Westerns; and the industry is not likely to venture into a long-life project which is "educational" and therefore will be automatically considered unpopular. In the circumstances we can suggest only the following strategy for the consideration of the recording houses: over the long term make the coverage complete; make the sleeve note of each release as fully informative as possible; every three years or so, issue a catalogue, not of the usual type, but modelled on the *Listener's History of Music* by Scholes, where the text is planned as an introduction to music and records are cited, not chronologically according to date of release or alphabetically in relation to composer, singer or player, but in relevant places in the discussion of the evolution of forms or the analysis of structure. This outline may perhaps be clarified a little.

The coverage by now, with the accumulation of years, though far from being complete, is richer than one would suspect. In the tradition of high classicism, we have a magisterial 12-disc album by Balchander, the wizard of the veena, presenting all the 72 *Melakarta Ragas* of the southern system.

We have *Dhrupad* and all the schools of *Kheyal*—Kirana, Agra, Patiala, Jaipur, etc. From A.I.R. archives and elsewhere, the voices of the maestros of the past—like Abdul Karim Khan and Abdul Wahid Khan of the Kirana Gharana—are being resurrected. Compositions by the great figures of the south—Purandaradasa, Tyagaraja, Syama Sastri, Dikshitar, Swati—are available. All the major instruments have been covered and you can even get a disc of Sundari, the not well-known member of the reed family. The *Baul* and *Kirtan* of Bengal, the *Lavani* as well as stage songs of Maharashtra, the Punjab *Kissa* (Heer-Rangha, Sohni-Mahiwal, etc.), *Bhajans* and even *Harikathas* are available. *Padams* and *Javalis* from the south are not well represented, and there must be many other such forms from other regions. The gaps should be spotted and filled.

Helpful Aids

While the heritage is thus being made conveniently accessible, very little attention is being given to making it fully assimilable. In many discs of southern vocal music, the first few words of the songs are mentioned as titles, but the composers are not mentioned and one can get no idea what the songs are about. In the case one disc of Tukaram's *Lavanis*, I found the sleeve note written in Marathi. The Marathis know their legacy, it is the others who have to be helped to the heritage. In another disc, of the songs of the Tiruppugazh, the sleeve note contained some hagiological stuff about the miracles of Arunagirinathar, no illuminating account of this great legacy of Saivite hymnals. A little more, but not enough, thought has been given in the 2 LP album of Tiruppavai, the songs of Andal, the ninth century Meera of the south, rendered by Vasantakumari. The texts of all the thirty lyrics have been given in the sleeve note—but in Tamil. Surely this has not been considerate or imaginative. One could have made this album a rich treasure in several ways. Transliteration in Roman script could have been provided to enable non-Tamilians to learn to sing these songs. And that would have been a great musical education, for these thirty songs have been sung in as many *Ragas*. The scales of these *Ragas* could have been given. Translations of the lyrics could also have been provided to enable a Vaishnavite tradition of the south to become assimilated as integral part of the great Vaishnavite tradition of India which has influenced our literature, poetry, music, painting, sculpture.

The good things we do can be done much better with a little thought and very little additional expense. If sleeve notes are written in a really adequate manner, catalogues (shaped as introduction to music as suggested earlier), issued every three years or so, can become very rich aids to self-education. They should be well-indexed and cross-referenced so that one would be able to look up any composer, musical form and even specific composition, besides singer or player.

Demand in art is slack when the level of taste is low and it is not wide-

spread either. If taste is deepened and made more wide-spread by the provision as such facilities for self-education, even more sophisticated projects will become commercially feasible. For European music we have an excellent disc on the instruments of the orchestra with commentary by Yehudi Menuhin. We could have a disc of this type for each of our instruments. For instance, when I read S.K. Saxena on tempo and rhythm, I get an idea of the great world of enchantment that would open up if I could understand their aesthetics with the help of his insights. But I am not particularly bright and I need to hear—and hear again and again—percussion sequences illustrating all the subtle beauties he talks about. Why not have a disc on the technique and aesthetics of the Tabla or Mridangam? And likewise, for every instrument?

From zeroing down to specific expressional modalities like a particular instrument or musical form, the endeavour can move to larger perspectives like, for instance, studying the humanistic fertility of a great tradition as it flows through the centuries and through many regions, generating endlessly varied styles, all entrancing. At a seminar on the *Gita Govinda* held jointly by all the three National Academies some years ago, I listened to innumerable styles of singing this Song of Songs. It was really a *lokantikranta* (out of this world) experience of the type our old aestheticians have written about while discussing the transcendental reach of aesthetic delight. But, as T.S. Eliot said, “after the vision, the exile.” For I have never been able to have that experience again. Is it so very difficult to have an album or at least a disc on the various regional styles of singing the *Gita Govinda*?